THE GODS ALSO KILL THOSE THEY HAVE MADE BEAUTIFUL

A Tragedy in Five Acts

by

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A play of pride, prophecy, and the price of beauty

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A Note on the Play

This tragedy was written in the shadow of the old stories, those told under the udala tree and in the quiet of the shrine. It asks a simple, difficult question: why do the gods shape beauty only to test how long it can stand without bowing?

Munachi is not a monster. He is a young man who was told, from the hour of his birth, that he was exceptional. He believed it. The people believed it. And belief, when it hardens into certainty, becomes a kind of blindness. The play does not ask us to hate him. It asks us to recognise the quiet danger of any gift that is praised too loudly, too early, and without the counterweight of humility.

The language has been shaped for the stage and for the page, rooted in the cadence of Igbo oral tradition, yet open to any audience that has ever watched a bright life burn itself out.

N. M. O.

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MUNACHI
Prince of Umuagu. Young, gifted in speech and bearing, raised under a heavy prophecy. His beauty and brilliance are both gift and burden.

NNEZE
Queen of Umuagu, mother of Munachi. Present in the opening scenes; her fear for her child is the first human note of the tragedy.

KING NNAJIEZE
King of Umuagu, father of Munachi. A man who once ruled with quiet strength and now watches the cost of his own pride in his son.

NNAJIOKWO
Elderly high priest of Amadioha / Amanakwa. The voice of warning, tradition, and the old covenant between the living and the gods.

AZUKA
High Priestess. Scarred by lightning, she speaks when the gods choose to answer.

MMADUABUCHI
The blind seer. Sees further than those with sight. Feared and half ignored by the village.

ADAORA
Beloved of Munachi. She loves the man, not the prophecy, and is the last to speak his name with tenderness.

ELDERS
Okoega, Ominyi, Magnus, Nwakaego, Ifeoma, the council of Umuagu, caught between loyalty to the prince and fear of the

gods.

THE CHORUS

Maidens, young men, priests, and villagers. They sing the memory of the land and the warnings that go unheard.

VILLAGERS, WARRIORS, MESSENGERS, PRIESTS

The living texture of Umuagu.

SETTING

The action takes place in the kingdom of Umuagu, in the sacred grove, the village square, the royal courtyard, the battlefield, and the ancestral burial ground.

ACT I

THE PROPHECY OF BIRTH

Scene 1

The Sacred Grove of Amanakwa

Night. Mist hangs low among the trees. The only sounds are the rustle of dry leaves

and the distant hoot of an owl. A large carved statue of Amanakwa stands at the

centre of the grove, its eyes painted red, its mouth open as if mid speech. At its feet

lies the skull of a white ram, dried blood dark against the soil. A clay torch flickers.

The air carries the scent of incense, camwood, and dried herbs.

At rise: NNAJIOKWO, a frail but intense elderly priest in flowing white, body marked

with white chalk and red camwood, kneels before the shrine in deep incantation. Beside

him, NNEZE, the heavily pregnant queen, pants and trembles on a low stool, draped in

blue and white. Her eyes are wide with fear.

NNAJIOKWO

(chanting, eyes closed)

Amanakwa! Amanakwa!! Amanakwa!!!

Thunder lord whose feet break mountains

Voice that tears the clouds apart

Father of storm and sword

Let your breath enter this grove.

Let the wind carry your voice.

Let fire shape your will.

A sudden gust. The torch trembles. The leaves hiss.

NNEZE

(clutching her belly, gasping)

Priest… my womb burns.

The child kicks like a lion caught in a trap.

A mother may know the child in her womb, but the road beneath his feet belongs to fate.

What is this torment?

NNAJIOKWO

(still in trance)

Silence, daughter of the earth.

The gods are near.

I hear their sandals upon the dust.

He throws white chalk and powdered kola into the fire. The smoke rises in spirals, then

darkens.

NNAJIOKWO

(voice deepening, possessed)

A prince shall be born beneath the crimson moon.

His cry will silence the drums.

His face, brighter than the rising sun on dewy grass.

His tongue will bend elders the way wind bends palm leaves.

His hands will carry thoughts too sharp for peace.

NNEZE

(whispering, awe mixed with hope)

Then the land will rejoice.

A child of light.

A gift from the gods…

NNAJIOKWO

(sudden, voice cracking)

No gift comes without its chain.

As the elders say, the hand that receives the kola must remember the hand that planted the tree.

No flame without its shadow.

The gods do not give with both hands.

Thunder rumbles faintly. Nneze shivers. An owl hoots three times in the distance.

NNAJIOKWO

(slower, solemn)

To this child they give the crown of charm

the blade of wisdom

the robe of destiny…

But inside him they bury a seed

the seed of Nkemjika.

Pride that eats its own father.

Arrogance that laughs at the gods.

NNEZE

(weeping, crawling toward the statue)

Mercy! Mercy, Amadioha!

Take me instead. Take my blood, take my breath.

But spare this one. He has done nothing yet.

NNAJIOKWO

(shaking, pointing)

You cannot barter with fate.

A man cannot bargain with the river after he has stepped into its current.

His chi has been carved from the flame of challenge.

He will know greatness.

And he will spit at the hands that shaped it.

When he begins to believe himself a god

the sky will crack

and the iroko will fall across the path of ants.

A louder thunderclap. Lightning flickers. Nneze screams as a contraction seizes her.

NNEZE

(crying out)

What curse is this?

Why make him brilliant if brilliance will kill him?

NNAJIOKWO

(softly, almost to himself)

Because the gods are cruel.

And they are wise.

They raise monuments only to watch them crumble.

He stands and raises both hands toward the statue.

NNAJIOKWO

He is the fire and the ash.

The eagle and the fall.

He is beauty made flesh

CHORUS

(offstage, echoing)

And the gods also kill those they have made beautiful·

The torch goes out. A final wail moves through the grove. The stage fades to darkness.

CURTAIN

Scene 2

The Village Square, Umuagu

A brilliant morning. The square is alive with colour and movement. Women

pound yam. Children chase one another between stalls. Men wrestle in open circles.

Flute players and drummers perform beneath a giant mango tree. Smoke from

roasted maize drifts on the air. A totem of Ani, the Earth goddess, stands crowned

with fresh palm fronds and red cloth. Villagers wear white and ochre for the

festival of Oji nzu. Peace is visible, yet something uneasy moves beneath it.

Enter CHORUS, maidens and young men in white and blue, dancing, some carrying

baskets of palm wine and yam. They sing in praise of Munachi.

CHORUS

O son of light, Munachi

whose tongue drips wisdom like morning dew

whose mind outshines the stars above

you are the dawn of Umuagu.

Your shadow silences quarrels.

Your smile calms the quarrelsome wind.

O prince of words and reason

shine, but not too close to the sun…

Drummers quicken. Women ululate. Wrestlers pause to clap.

VILLAGER 1

Have you heard how he answered the emissaries of Obieze without

raising a hand?

VILLAGER 2

He said, “The loudest spear is often hollow.” Even the elders had no

reply.

VILLAGER 3

(a woman)

He listens the way the gods are said to listen. Even a madman grows

quiet when Munachi speaks.

Enter MUNACHI: tall, calm, wrapped in a flowing white cloth. Red coral beads at his

neck. A carved ivory staff in his hand. His entrance stills the square. Children stop playing.

People rise or bow slightly.

MUNACHI

(raising a hand, gentle)

People of Umuagu, sons of the soil, daughters of Ani.

The yam does not boast before harvest, and the lion does not roar while

it drinks.

Let us be like the river: deep, and quiet.

Let the harvest be honest. Let quarrels die in silence.

Let no man cheat at the market. Let no woman curse her sister’s womb.

Peace is not weakness. It is the harder kind of wisdom.

VILLAGERS

(in unison, bowing)

Iseeeeee!

ELDER OMINYI

(stepping forward with a carved stool)

My son…

When your father ruled, they called him Ugo n’eme ogu, the eagle that

fights without flapping its wings.

But you… you are the light under the clouds.

You speak, and men stop talking.

Where does this wisdom come from?

MUNACHI

(smiling, modest)

From the old women who sweep the market at dawn.

From the madman who preaches under the mango tree.

From failure, which teaches more honestly than praise.

The lizard that fell from the iroko tree praised himself because no one else was there to praise him.

And perhaps, from the gods, if they still listen to Umuagu.

Laughter and warm applause. A child runs forward with a palm frond crown.

CHILD

My papa says you will become a king even the gods will fear!

MUNACHI

(lifting the child)

A child speaks the dreams of the land.

But even the tree that grows high must first dig deep.

If I am anything, it is because I stand on the bones of those who came

before me.

And you, little one, one day you will stand on mine.

CHORUS

(softly, in the background)

He speaks like rain on dry earth…

He heals old wounds with few words…

He carries greatness like a calabash of water, carefully, carefully…

A stranger enters quietly, an OLD WOMAN, bent, wrapped in dark cloth. She watches

from the edge of the crowd.

VILLAGER 4

Who is that? I do not know her face.

VILLAGER 5

(whispering)

Perhaps a witch. Or a spirit come to test our prince’s words.

MUNACHI

(noticing her, respectful)

Mother, you wear dust on your feet and time on your face.

Come forward. Drink with us.

OLD WOMAN

(smiling faintly)

Ah… young light. You shine brightly today.

May you never forget that even light casts a shadow.

A tree that forgets its roots will one day learn the language of the axe.

She turns and walks away without another word. The drums falter for a moment.

ELDER OMINYI

(half laughing)

The old ones speak in riddles.

MUNACHI

(serious now)

Riddles are the nets with which truth is caught.

He who asks questions does not lose his way.

CHORUS

(tone shifting, slower, more cautious)

But who can dance with the gods and not be burned?

Who can rise like the iroko and not feel the wind?

The dancing resumes, but slower, more deliberate. The flutes take on a melancholic note

beneath the festivity. Thunder murmurs faintly in the distance.

CURTAIN

Scene 3

The Shrine of Amanakwa

Night has settled like a thick cloth. A full moon hangs cold above the sacred forest.

The shrine of Amadioha glistens with an eerie stillness. The mask of the god

half human, half lightning, is veiled in red cloth. Clay pots release spirals of

incense. Palm fronds flutter. Behind the altar stands a cracked stone throne.

Crickets fall silent whenever the chanting begins, as if the forest itself is listening.

At rise: HIGH PRIESTESS AZUKA, aged but powerful, kneels at the foot of the veiled

mask. White ash streaks her face. Scars shaped like lightning mark her back. Behind her

CHANTING PRIESTS sway in rhythm, wearing raffia skirts and ankle rattles, holding

clay pots of sacred smoke.

PRIESTS

(chanting)

Amanakwa, eye in the storm!

Amanakwa, breaker of pride!

Let your mouth open!

Let your thunder speak!

They bow three times and fall silent. Azuka raises her head slowly. Her voice carries the

weight of trance.

AZUKA

O thunderer, O flame that walks the sky

O hammer that breaks the unbowed tree

the people sing a name too loudly.

They dance around a child crowned with morning light.

Tell me: have you blessed him with your breath

or have you marked him for mourning?

She sprinkles kola dust on the flames. A gust of wind. The torches dim one by one.

CHORUS OF PRIESTS

(whispering)

Speak, O voice beyond the veil…

Speak before men forget how to crawl…

AZUKA

(standing slowly, possessed)

The gods smile, yes. But their smiles are not mercy.

The gods bless, yes. But their blessings cut both ways.

The boy shines like a mirror left in the sun.

But mirrors crack.

He speaks as one born with the tongues of ancestors

yet he does not listen.

He binds hearts, yes.

But his own heart is already claimed by pride.

Thunder murmurs. Azuka shakes. Her voice deepens, more than human.

AZUKA
(booming)

He shall rise like the morning star.

He shall bend men the way fire bends dry reed.

But he shall never truly know himself.

CHORUS OF PRIESTS

The fire that forgets the pot

will burn the stew and the hut.

AZUKA
(trembling)

He will call pride “justice.”

He will call arrogance “destiny.”

And when the gods knock

he will answer with a sword.

A gong booms inside the shrine. All torches go out. Only moonlight remains. Wind howls.

AZUKA
(now whispering)

When the eagle flies too high, the sky sends wind.

When a child forgets the ground, he walks into the sky barefoot.

And the land… the land shall mourn.

CHORUS OF PRIESTS

The land shall mourn!

AZUKA
(falling to her knees)

It is done.

He is the child of the gods

but the gods also kill those they have made beautiful.

The Chorus rises, circling the shrine, hands lifted in lament.

CHORUS
(slow dirge)

Not in wrath… but in remembrance.

Not in hate… but in design.

The gods shape beauty

only to see if it will remember who made it.

Azuka faints. The priests catch her. The torch flames return slowly. An owl hoots once more.

The stage dims as the chanting continues softly.

CURTAIN

ACT II

THE SEER SPEAKS

Scene 1

Umuagu Village Square

Midday. The square is busy. Palm frond stalls display yams, vegetables, red

cloths, and carved wooden wares. Children play tag. Soft flute music drifts while

old men drink palm wine under a large udala tree. At the far edge, seated on a

mat, is MMADUABUCHI, the blind seer. Milky eyes. A carved staff beside him.

A gourd of water and a calabash of bones at his feet. An owl’s feather is tied

around his wrist.

At rise: Villagers laugh, trade, and banter. Mmaduabuchi begins to murmur. His head

tilts as if listening to something no one else can hear.

MMADUABUCHI
(softly)

A crown floats in blood…

A tree stretches, too proud to bow…

Its roots crack stone

but the storm forgets no name.

VILLAGER 1
(passing, whispering)

He is speaking again… the blind one.

VILLAGER 2

Better a madman than a silent god.

VILLAGER 3

(uneasy)

He sees what we dare not dream.

More villagers gather, forming a loose circle. The market noise drops.

MMADUABUCHI

(voice rising)

I saw a child with the sun in his eyes

but his shadow was already swallowing the village.

I saw the earth crack…

not from war, but from a name too heavy for its soil.

VILLAGER 4

What does he mean?

VILLAGER 5

He speaks of our prince… of Munachi.

MMADUABUCHI

(pointing blindly upward)

Beware the one whose face blinds even the gods.

Beware the tongue that treats thunder like a toy.

The gods do not sleep. They watch.

Murmurs spread. Elders approach.

ELDER OKOEGA

(stern)

Enough, Mmaduabuchi. Your riddles stir fear.

This is a time of peace. Our prince walks with wisdom.

MMADUABUCHI

(banging his staff on the ground)

Even the wise forget they are dust!

A child who refuses the counsel of an elder walks barefoot into the thorn bush.

He will mock the sky

and the sky will answer with fire.

Drums sound a low, ominous beat. The CHORUS enters from the side, robed in grey. They

form a semicircle behind the crowd and begin a low, haunting chant.

CHORUS

The wind hears what men ignore…

The roots tremble before the leaves know.

A name praised too loudly

echoes in the halls of thunder.

Enter MUNACHI with young warriors and maidens, laughing. He stops when he sees the

crowd and hears his name whispered.

MUNACHI

(smiling)

What gathering is this?

Has another yam grown into a god

or are we selling madness in gourds today?

VILLAGER 6

(hesitant)

My prince… he speaks of you.

MUNACHI

(amused at first)

The blind man again?

He approaches Mmaduabuchi. The smile fades as he comes closer.

MUNACHI
(quietly)

Old man, your tongue runs faster than your thoughts.

Do you want to be dragged before the council for sowing fear?

MMADUABUCHI
(calm)

Only the guilty fear prophecy.

The man who carries a basket of eggs should not challenge the rocky road.

MUNACHI
(leaning in)

You see nothing. You are blind.

MMADUABUCHI
Yet I see more than you ever will.

MUNACHI
(mocking)

You see shadows. I am the sun.

MMADUABUCHI
(firm)

And it is the sun that burns the fastest.

You speak of power, but you carry pride like a second skin.

You wear wisdom like armour

but you have not yet met the spear of fate.

MUNACHI
(stepping back, voice rising)

I do not kneel before wind and thunder.

I do not tremble before ghost talk.

ELDER OKOEGA
(warning)

Prince… watch your words. The gods do not forget insult.

MUNACHI
(addressing everyone)

Enough of this.

I am not the child of this man’s dreams.

I shape my fate with my own hands.

Let the gods come. I will not bow.

CHORUS
(chanting louder, urgent)

He who dares the storm

must know the price of thunder.

He who mocks the sky

shall dine beneath the earth.

MMADUABUCHI
(lifting his staff)

Then mark this day, people of Umuagu:

the prince has been warned.

The wind shall speak, and it will not whisper.

Silence. A single gust moves through the square. A bird cries overhead.

MUNACHI
(turning, voice cold)

Let the wind howl.

I write my own story.

The sky has no pen that can match mine.

He exits, flanked by his followers. Murmurs rise.
Mmaduabuchi sits again, face turned

toward the sky.

CHORUS

(dirge rising as they kneel)

O land that births lions

teach your cubs to crawl before they roar.

For pride is the fruit that grows beside poison.

the gods also kill those they have made beautiful

Lights fade slowly. Market sounds return, distant and thin.

CURTAIN

ACT III

THE DEFIANCE

Scene 1

The Sacred Grove of Amanakwa

Dusk. The grove seems to hold its breath. Towering trees enclose the shrine like

silent witnesses. A giant statue of Amadioha stands at the altar’s centre, veiled in

thick red cloth. The air is thick with incense and something watchful. Lightning

flickers in the sky, but no thunder follows. Old animal bones, broken gourds, and

offerings of palm oil, now black with dust, litter the ground.

At rise: MUNACHI enters slowly, cloaked in red and gold. In one hand a carved dagger, in

the other a ritual staff. His eyes burn with determination. He pauses at the edge of the grove

breathes deeply, and steps in.

MUNACHI
(to himself)

So this is where the gods hide.

Behind masks. Behind shrines. Behind silence.

They speak in riddles through toothless priests.

They promise greatness, then curse the great.

I am no goat for slaughter.

I am the storm they should fear.

He walks boldly to the altar. He removes the red veil from the statue and stares into its stone

eyes.

MUNACHI
(mocking)

God of thunder.

Bearer of storm.

Where is your voice now?

You gave me beauty like a trap.

You gave me wisdom like a curse.

You wrapped me in prophecy

then tied my fate to ruin.

Why give a man wings

if you fear he will fly?

He raises the dagger and points it at the sky.

MUNACHI
(shouting)

Strike me, then!

Split the heavens if you dare!

Show me your thunder. Show me your wrath!

I, Munachi, do not kneel!

A loud gust rushes through the grove. Leaves whirl. Torches flicker violently. The idol's eyes

seem to glow a faint red.

MUNACHI
(laughing)

Is that your voice? Wind?

Old women cry louder than that.

He spits at the base of the statue.

VOICE

(offstage, deep, echoing)

Munachi!

He turns sharply. NNAJIOKWO steps from the shadows. His face is grave. His staff

trembles slightly.

NNAJIOKWO

You walk naked, child

naked before the eyes of the gods.

This is not a palace. This is not a court.

This is the place where even kings learn to crawl.

MUNACHI

(cold)

You followed me?

Like a fly that stalks blood?

NNAJIOKWO

(firm)

I followed the scent of arrogance.

Even the python that grows too long forgets its own coil.

MUNACHI

(mocking)

Your proverbs are dry leaves.

I have no time for riddles.

NNAJIOKWO

Then hear this plainly.

You have touched what should never be touched.

You have mocked the sacred.

You have spat into the wind, and the wind remembers your face.

He who throws a stone into the market should not complain when the sound returns to his doorway.

The gods are not dead.

They are waiting.

MUNACHI

(stepping closer)

Let them wait.

The palm tree that grows taller than its neighbours still bows when the wind arrives.

Let them plot.

I will outlive their stories.

I carry thunder in my own chest.

When a man says yes, his chi says yes, but the wise man still looks where he places his feet.

I need no god to make me great.

NNAJIOKWO

(voice rising)

You mistake light for fire.

You mistake the echo for the voice.

You were loved.

You were chosen.

But now the gods turn their backs

and when gods turn, the earth follows.

The Chorus enters from the side in silence. They do not sing. They stand as if already

mourning.

MUNACHI

(looking around)

Even the chorus gathers to watch my rebellion?

Good. Let them remember. Let them chant.

Tell them: the prince stood

and the gods blinked first.

NNAJIOKWO

(softly)

Then hear the final prophecy.

You are no longer prince.

You are no longer blessed.

You are now the lesson.

When the skies weep blood

and the birds forget how to sing

your name will not be praised.

It will be whispered in warnings.

Lightning flashes. Thunder finally roars. The wind howls through the trees.

CHORUS

(chanting slowly)

When a child slaps the face of spirit

even the ancestors weep.

When beauty dares the mask

the mask breaks the mirror.

MUNACHI

(stepping down from the altar)

Let them weep.

But I will not bow.

He walks past Nnajiokwo without looking back. As he passes, the torches extinguish one by

one. A distant eagle screeches.

NNAJIOKWO

(kneeling at the altar)

Chi ya egbuola ya, his chi has already killed him.

This one’s soul has stepped ahead of its shadow.

CHORUS

(solemn final dirge)

The gods also kill those they have made beautiful.

Not in haste. Not in fury.

But in silence…

Lights go to black.

CURTAIN

Scene 2

Omens of War, The Royal Courtyard

Evening. The royal courtyard of Umuagu is heavy with tension. The once lively

palace has grown silent and grey. Smoke from sacrificial altars curls in the breeze.

A large bonfire burns low at the centre, throwing flickering shadows. Elders sit in

a semi circle, faces lined with worry. A carved wooden drum lies untouched. Storm

clouds gather. The birds have stopped singing.

At rise: The elders sit quietly. KING NNAJIEZE, older and more worn, sits on his stool

wrapped in a faded royal cloth. His eyes are hollow. NNAJIOKWO stands at a distance

head bowed.

KING NNAJIEZE
(softly)

This silence…

It is the silence before the teeth of the sky bite the earth.

I hear no laughter. I see no birds. Even the wind seems to mourn.

ELDER MAGNUS
(gravely)

Your Majesty…

The gods have not spoken since your son entered the grove.

The yam harvests rot beneath the soil.

The river swelled last night and took three children.

ELDER OMINYI
The goats miscarry.

Rain falls when the sky is clear.

Even the dogs howl at nothing.

KING NNAJIEZE
Then they have turned their face from us.

A loud cry offstage. Moments later a MESSENGER rushes in, panting, covered in dust.

MESSENGER
(kneeling)

My king. My elders.

I return from the Obieze boundary.

Three farmlands, burned to black ash.

The warriors of Ngbo are marching.

Their chieftain sends this scroll…

He unrolls the scroll and reads aloud.

MESSENGER

“If Umuagu still hides behind the mask of a fading lion

let it show its teeth.

Or surrender the son who spat on the gods.”

A shocked gasp from the council. Nnajiokwo closes his eyes. Thunder murmurs above.

KING NNAJIEZE

(trembling)

This is the smoke that follows the spark.

We warned him.

We begged the sky.

But pride… pride climbs faster than a palm wine tapper.

ELDER MAGNUS

Our men are weary.

The spears are few.

Obieze has iron that sings through bone.

Enter MUNACHI, cloaked in shimmering red and black. His eyes are fierce. He carries a

newly carved sword shaped like lightning. Behind him, two drummers beat slow war

rhythms.

MUNACHI

(bold)

Let them come.

Let them bring their gods and their iron spears.

Let them bring curses and warriors

I will write their defeat in the dust of our gate.

KING NNAJIEZE
(weakly)

You speak as if the land is a drum beneath your foot.

But even drums break when struck too hard.

A pot may be strong, but the hand that strikes it knows where it is weakest.

ELDER OMINYI
(rising)

You walk like a lion, boy.

The lion that forgets the hunter's arrow will not grow old in the forest.

But lions die too

and their bones do not roar.

MUNACHI
(angry)

I do not fear war.

I was born in prophecy.

Let the blood I spill satisfy the silence of the gods.

NNAJIOKWO
(stepping forward)

War is not a hammer to cure pride.

When two elephants fight, the grass does not ask which one is right before it is crushed.

It is the flute of vultures.

It sings of death in every key.

MUNACHI
(mocking)

You sound like a man already buried.

I fear neither vulture nor priest.

If I am to carry this land on my shoulders

then let me do it through fire.

KING NNAJIEZE
(rising with effort)

And what of your mother’s tears?

What of the river that no longer reflects the sky?

The gods do not punish with words.

They punish with absence.

Our yams rot. Our wombs dry.

Our dreams shiver in the night.

You have broken the mirror of blessing, my son.

MUNACHI
(quietly, eyes hardening)

Then I will forge a new one in war.

> *The man who lights a fire to frighten the darkness may burn the house he is trying to protect.*

If thunder will not speak for us

let our spears speak louder.

The Chorus enters softly from behind pillars, singing a dirge.

CHORUS

The proud walk ahead of their shadow…

and forget their breath belongs to the wind.

He who feeds on praise

grows too fat for wisdom.

The wind that shakes the tree

does not warn the leaf.

Munachi raises his sword. Drummers beat faster. War paint is smeared across his face.

MUNACHI

I will go to war.

And the land will rise with me.

Let the gods watch from their clouded thrones

I do not kneel.

KING NNAJIEZE

(softly, defeated)

Then go.

When the road is long, the feet must learn patience before the mouth begins to boast.

But when the sky breaks

do not say we did not weep for you.

NNAJIOKWO

(kneeling, eyes full of sorrow)

It begins.

The drumbeat of pride is the music of mourning.

CHORUS

(chanting low)

The earth does not forget footfalls.

The sky does not forget insults.

And fate does not forget its promise.

Lights fade as war drums rise. The torches dim. Only the echo of the drums remains.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

THE FALL BEGINS

Scene 1

The Eagle Takes Flight

Pre dawn. A foggy battlefield outside Umuagu. Palm trees sway as if in

mourning. Spears stand planted in the ground like tombstones. Young warriors

kneel before small clay idols. Drummers keep a low, heartbeat rhythm. War paint

covers their faces. The sky is the colour of ash.

At rise: MUNACHI stands before his warriors in a crimson battle robe, black streaks across

his face, a necklace of leopard teeth at his throat. He grips the Ikenga staff high. Behind him

ADAORA stands quietly, pale with fear. NNAJIOKWO and MMADUABUCHI watch

from a distant rise, like silent witnesses.

MUNACHI
(addressing the warriors)

Sons of Umuagu!

Children of flame and thunder!

Today is not for cowards.

Today we greet the sun not with song

but with the cry of spears.

Ngbo has mocked our soil.

They burned our farms.

They spat on our gods.

WARRIORS
(shouting)

Never again! Never again!

MUNACHI
(raising his blade)

Let the rivers run red!

Let their women wail!

Let the sky remember the voice of men!

Warriors beat their shields. A horn is blown.

NNAJIOKWO
(stepping forward)

You call the sky, child.

But the sky remembers.

Last night a hawk flew backward over the camp.

The trees shed leaves though the wind was still.

The ground trembled though no foot touched it.

Even the ancestors whisper, but you hear only drums.

MUNACHI
(sharply)

Let them whisper.

I have heard whispers my whole life

whispers from old men who fear their own shadows.

I am the roar that breaks the whisper.

I carry my own thunder in this chest.

ADAORA

(rushing to him, taking his hand)

Munachi

do not go.

I dreamed of rivers running backwards

and the moon bleeding.

You march to carve your name

but I fear you are carving your grave.

MUNACHI

(gently)

Adaora, my rose…

I was born to roar.

> *The cock that crows before dawn should remember that the sun does not rise because of its voice.*

To shrink now is to betray my name.

ADAORA

(pleading)

Then take me with you.

Let me carry your shadow

if you must walk into darkness.

MUNACHI

(whispering)

No.

You must stay.

You are light. This path is shadow.

He turns away from her.

MMADUABUCHI

(singing from the ridge)

He who runs ahead of his chi

shall meet the spear meant for the goat.

He who spits into the sky

shall wear the rain as a crown.

MUNACHI

(furious)

Enough riddles!

When the elder points at the moon, the fool stares at the finger and misses the light.

Let the battle begin!

Let the gods tremble!

I will not kneel!

He slams the Ikenga staff into the ground. Lightning flashes. A loud crack of thunder splits

the silence.

WARRIOR LEADER

(shouting)

Onward! For Umuagu!

Drummers intensify. The warriors charge offstage, led by Munachi. Wind rises violently.

Dust and leaves swirl. Adaora drops to her knees, sobbing. Nnajiokwo closes his eyes.

CHORUS

(singing in lament)

The eagle takes flight at dawn

but the wind waits with open hands.

The branch does not crack when the bird lands

it cracks when the gods have turned away.

NNAJIOKWO

(to the sky)

He marches not to battle…

but into the belly of the gods.

ADAORA

(weeping)

Let me be the last to speak his name with love

before the vultures learn to sing it.

Lights dim. The mist thickens. War drums rise… then stop abruptly. Silence.

CURTAIN

Scene 2

When the Palm Tree Falls

The royal courtyard. A grey afternoon. The sky hangs low, heavy with unshed

rain. Smoke rises from incense sticks at the four corners of the palace. The fountain

trickles faintly. Palace maids sweep dry leaves in silence. Mourning songs drift

from the distance. The air feels hollow.

At rise: KING NNAJIEZE sits on a low stool. His wrapper is torn. His staff of office lies at

his feet. He does not speak. He does not blink. ADAORA enters slowly, barefoot, her wrapper

soaked with dust and blood. In her hands is Munachi’s bloodied leopard tooth necklace.

ADAORA

(kneeling, voice cracked)

My king…

I bring the last breath of your son.

He lies beneath the udele tree in Okpoko…

not pierced by Ngbo’s iron

but stabbed in the back, by his own captain.

A gasp. Elders murmur. NNAJIOKWO enters from the shrine, chalk still fresh on his face

carrying a small calabash.

KING NNAJIEZE

(slowly standing)

Not by the enemy?

Not by war?

By a hand that once bowed before him?

ADAORA

He turned his back to rally the men…

and the blade found him before the trumpet.

KING NNAJIEZE

(voice rising)

What madness is this?

He was a lion!

A lion is still mortal, and even the strongest tree must one day answer the axe.

He was a storm!

He was mine!

NNAJIOKWO

He was pride wrapped in prophecy.

And prophecy does not beg.

It only waits.

KING NNAJIEZE
(screaming)

The gods took his mother!

Now they take him?

Are we cattle in their theatre?

NNAJIOKWO
You offered him to pride, not to the gods.

They only took what they marked the day he spat into the wind.

Adaora places the necklace on the ground before the king. She stares into the dust.

ADAORA
(softly)

He died with his eyes open…

and the sky refused to close them.

He died before I could whisper his name one last time.

A chorus of palace maidens enters slowly, dressed in white and grey. They begin a funeral

chant.

CHORUS
He who flies without wings

shall fall into the teeth of the stones.

He who bathes in thunder

shall wake in the silence of the grave.

King Nnajieze stumbles, then kneels beside the necklace. He takes it in shaking hands.

KING NNAJIEZE

(to the sky)

Where were you, Chukwu?

The child who asks why the rain falls must also remember that the earth cannot choose what the sky releases.

Where were you when the light dimmed?

I danced at your festivals.

I spilled wine at your altar.

Why give me a son only to pluck him before harvest?

NNAJIOKWO

(placing the calabash before him)

The gods are not blind.

They sleep when pride grows loud.

This calabash holds a feather soaked in red.

His soul was made beautiful…

but within it was a crack too deep for love to seal.

KING NNAJIEZE

(weeping)

Oh Munachi…

They named you star…

but the sky was jealous.

ADAORA

(laying her hand on the necklace)

He was not only beauty.

He was not only brilliance.

He was… human.

And that, that was what the gods could not bear.

CHORUS

(kneeling)

the gods also kill those they have made beautiful

The mask that shines the most

breaks first in the dance of fate.

A distant roll of thunder. One hawk flies across the sky. A maid wails softly.

KING NNAJIEZE
(softly)

I crowned his flaw and called it royalty.

Let no father call thunder a crown again.

The crown that is too heavy for the head becomes a stone around the neck.

He stands and lifts the broken staff of office.

KING NNAJIEZE

Let his name be carved into stone.

Not as a warning

but as a wound.

Lights dim. A single spotlight rests on the necklace on the ground.

CURTAIN

ACT V

THE RECKONING

Scene 1

The Burial of the Brightest

The ancestral grove beneath the udara tree. The air is thick with silence and

incense. Palm fronds circle a central burial mound covered with pure white cloth.

Clay lamps flicker. A pot of ashes burns steadily. The ground is freshly dug. A lone

flute wails from afar. The sky is still grey. It has forgotten how to shine.

At rise: Four strong youths lower Munachi's cloth wrapped body into the grave. They move

slowly, heads bowed. ADAORA kneels beside the grave, motionless. Elders form a solemn

half circle. KING NNAJIEZE stands without a crown, his wrapper stained with earth.

NNAJIOKWO stands beside him, silent. The CHORUS enters, robed in raffia and chalk.

ELDER NWAKAEGO
(chief elder)

Let the wind carry our grief.

Let the earth drink this sorrow.

Let the trees that once sheltered him

now shelter his bones.

He came as fire

and fire must return to ash.

ELDER IFEOMA

(priestess)

We do not bury only a man

we bury a name that soared too fast.

The gods did not weep.

They only remember.

And in remembering, they demand from us silence… and blood.

A pause. All eyes turn to King Nnajieze, who slowly steps forward.

KING NNAJIEZE

(hoarsely)

I failed him.

A father who praises only the height of his child may forget to teach him where the ground is.

I gave him wings…

but never taught him the wind.

I praised his flaw…

and called it strength.

I fed his pride…

and called it prophecy.

But now…

he lies in the earth like the rest of us.

He turns to the grave.

KING NNAJIEZE

(to his son)

Munachi…

You were not the fire.

You were the spark the wind could not tame.

Let your story not be forgotten

but let it never be repeated.

He sprinkles dust into the grave.

ADAORA

(rising slowly, approaching the mound)

I loved you.

Love may open the door, but wisdom must show the feet where to walk.

Not because the people did.

Not because your face shone like sunrise.

I loved you… because your heart was afraid to kneel.

And that was the part the gods could never forgive.

She kneels, kisses the cloth one last time, and places his leopard tooth necklace beside the

body.

CHORUS

(singing softly, swaying)

Beautiful was he, and cursed.

Sharp was he, and broken.

Beloved of the people

hated by fate.

the gods also kill those they have made beautiful

The grave is filled slowly. Nnajiokwo opens a calabash and pours libation on the soil: palm

wine, then ashes, then water.

NNAJIOKWO

(intoning)

To the gods who gave and took…

To the ancestors who remember…

Receive this son of fire.

Judge him not by his flaw

but by his fight.

Let his name return to the trees.

Let his soul rest where silence sings.

The Chorus kneels and pounds the ground three times.

CHORUS

(chanting)

Return, O light, to the place beyond names.

Sleep, O storm, where thunder cannot find you.

You are now wind.

You are now memory.

You are now the story we tell in warnings.

KING NNAJIEZE

(raising the Ikenga staff and snapping it in two)

Let this be the last grave I dig with pride.

Let no father make a god of his son.

Let Umuagu learn

that beauty is a gift…

but wisdom is a shield.

He tosses the broken staff into the grave. Thunder rumbles softly in the distance. All bow

their heads.

CHORUS

(final verse, rising in lament)

Cry, oh hills of Umuagu.

Mourn, oh trees who watched him grow.

The one who danced with thunder

now lies with shadows.

the gods also kill those they have made beautiful

As the curtain falls, rain begins to fall gently. A lone hawk circles once, then vanishes.

CURTAIN

Scene 2, Epilogue

The Shrine of Amanakwa

Night. A sacred clearing. The shrine of Amanakwa is silent and cold. Her clay

idol sits on a throne of stone, covered in chalk spirals. Its face bears no mouth

only eyes. A red torch flickers at its base. Mist drifts across the stage like forgotten

breath. The atmosphere is heavy with invisible watchers.

At rise: The CHORUS enters slowly, dressed in full mourning robes, white with black

bands. They hold long wooden staffs wrapped in black cloth. They move in a slow ritual

procession. At the centre sits the PRIESTESS OF AMANAKWA, cross legged before the

idol, her body covered in white chalk, eyelids closed. Her face is expressionless. A long silence

holds.

CHORUS (LEADER)

Come, watchers of destiny.

Come, scribes of the sky.

Tell us…

Why do the gods make beauty

if they plan to burn it?

Why do they give brilliance

if brilliance must be buried?

CHORUS

(in unison)

Why do the gods

create kings to be broken?

Why do they lift men

only to strike them mid flight?

The Priestess opens her eyes slowly. Her voice is flat, calm, eternal.

PRIESTESS OF AMANAKWA

Because the gods are not men.

They do not love as you love.

They do not forgive as you forgive.

They create to be worshipped.

They lift to test the air.

They shine light

to see if it dares rival the sun.

CHORUS (LEADER)

But he was good.

He was wise.

He wanted greatness.

PRIESTESS

And that was the sin.

> *The man who climbs the iroko must not mistake the height of the tree for the strength of his wings.*

For the gods are jealous

not of men

but of mirrors.

When a man reflects too much light

the gods fear forgetting themselves.

She rises slowly, still in trance.

PRIESTESS

They gave him wit, to see if he would question them.

They gave him pride, to see if he would name it destiny.

They gave him love, so that his death would echo louder.

And he, he accepted all.

He wore his flaw like a crown

his beauty like a sword

his fate like a dance.

CHORUS

(low)

And so the dance ended…

PRIESTESS

It is not cruelty.

It is design.

To every soul that shines too much

they offer two doors

Kneel, and be remembered as wise.

Stand, and be remembered as warning.

He chose to stand.

CHORUS (LEADER)

Then what must we learn?

What shall we teach our children?

What shall we carve into the trees?

PRIESTESS

(raising her hands)

Raise children with wisdom, not only with hope.

> *The child who is taught to walk will not fear the crooked road.*

Teach kings to fear thunder before they speak it.

Teach lovers to see beneath beauty.

Teach the proud that not all fire is light.

And when the gods give brilliance

let that soul walk carefully in shadow.

She turns to the clay idol and chants softly.

PRIESTESS

(chanting)

We return to you what you demanded.

We bury not just flesh

but a parable.

Let the wind remember.

Let the trees whisper it.

Let the bones speak when no one listens.

So that when next the gods make a man beautiful

he will know to tremble.

She kneels. The Chorus kneels with her and strikes the ground three times in rhythm.

CHORUS

(final chorus)

Tragedy is the tongue of the gods.

Fate is the ink.

Beauty, the parchment.

And we

we are only the readers

of stories written in stars.

The shrine torch flares suddenly. All lights vanish into darkness. A final peal of thunder

rumbles softly.

THE END

Nnaji Misheal Offor